

What Colin Powell Showed Us: The End of Arms Control and the Normalization of War

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I wonder if the Soviet Union would ask its Cuban colleague to permit a U.N. team to go to these sites. If so, I can assure you that we can direct them to the proper places very quickly.

Ambassador Adlai Stevenson to U.N. Security Council, 23 October 1962

We don't know precisely what Iraq was moving.

Secretary of State Colin Powell, remarks to U.N. Security Council, 5 February 2003

When push finally came to shove, Saddam Hussein's Iraq turned out to be, in the words of former British Air Marshall Sir Timothy Garden, a "spent power" -- Hussein's army hollowed by 12 years of sanctions. Although bristling with SCUDS and weapons of mass destruction in 1991, the Hussein regime met America for its final battle in 2003 with this capability already largely disabled, destroyed, or rendered ineffective.¹ For this, America's war plan owes a debt to the UN disarmament missions to Iraq, UNSCOM and UNMOVIC,² whose inspectors had plied Iraq for more than seven years. Indeed, the first and most important battle in this war was fought and won before a single shot was fired. It was the battle of sanctions and inspections, which gutted Iraq's economy and shriveled its military power.³ Notably, since the Gulf War, the quality gap

¹ Together, the two UN missions (UNSCOM and UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency destroyed or supervised the destruction of about 120 missiles, 66 missile warheads, 69 missile launchers, more than 38,500 filled and empty chemical munitions, 760 ton of chemical warfare agents, more than 3,300 tons of chemical warfare precursor chemicals, and 17,750 kg of biological weapon growth medium. In addition, Iraq claims to have destroyed as large a quantity of weapons unilaterally. The missions also destroyed all components of the Iraqi supergun, sealed the Abu Skhair uranium mine, destroyed 27 buildings related to missiles and nuclear weapons activity, destroyed the entire Al-Hakam biological weapons production facility, and destroyed thousands of pieces of equipment and components essential to the production of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Perhaps just as important, the presence of the inspectors over seven years disrupted any attempts by Iraq to reconstitute its program or test or train with any special weapons it might have retained.

Sources: *Unresolved Disarmament Issues Iraq's Proscribed Weapons Programmes*, UNMOVIC Working Document (UNMOVIC, 6 March 2003); and, *S/1999/94 Report on status of disarmament and monitoring* (UNSCOM, 29 January 1999), Enclosure 1: Report by Richard Butler on Disarmament.

² UN Special Commission (UNSCOM, 1991-1999) and UN Monitoring, Verification, and Inspections Commission (UNMOVIC, 1999-present).

³ Relevant to social cohesion and national spirit, Iraq's per capita income since the Gulf War averaged less than 30 percent of its 1989 level. According to Paul Rivlin of the Moshe Dyan Center at Tel Aviv University:

In 2000, GDP came to an estimated \$32 billion, 42% of its 1990 level. The population had increased by another 25%, to 23.6 million, so GDP per capital came to only \$1,356 -- less than one-third of the 1990 level in real terms.

between Iraqi and US forces had increased by as much as a factor of four, as measured by expenditures per soldier and by force modernization.

Alternatives to an Unnecessary War

Understanding the war and what it implies begins with understanding that it was manifestly unnecessary from a security perspective, failing to meet any of the customary criteria for self-defense, including those for preemptive self-defense. Even had Iraq retained weapons of mass destruction, it would not have been necessary from a security standpoint to wage war on it -- and certainly not a war with the aim of seizing the country. The same devastating power that was brought to bear against Iraq beginning 21 March 2003 would have served as America's deterrent guarantee against any Iraqi attack.

Military deterrence was the solid backstop to UN disarmament and monitoring efforts. That the Hussein regime could be deterred in its use of special weapons was proven during the 1990-1991 Gulf War.⁴ At the time, it had possessed such weapons in great numbers and kept them at a high state of readiness. However, in spite of suffering very heavy losses under a US-led coalition assault, Iraq resisted using its special weapons for fear of allied retaliation, including the threat of regime removal.

And 2000 was a relatively good year for the post-1990 Iraqi economy due to increased oil sales. The period 1991-1997 was simply devastating, with per capita GDP averaging below 25 percent of the 1989 level.

The impact of sanctions on the quality of Iraq's armed forces was even greater. After spending much more during the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq settled into spending approximately between \$15 billion and \$20 billion (2003 USD) annually during 1989 and 1990 to support a regular military of perhaps 750,000 troops. Its arms imports, also down from earlier years, were valued at approximately \$7 billion total for 1989 and 1990 -- about \$3.5 billion per year. During the Gulf War approximately 35-40 percent of Iraq's combat power was destroyed. Subsequently, its defense spending -- official and unofficial -- fell by 85 percent. Its arms imports declined by more than 95 percent, essentially making it impossible for Iraq to maintain its equipment in good working order, much less to modernize it.

During the 1990s Iraq had reduced the size of its armed forces by approximately 50 percent. Thus, its defense spending per person in uniform declined by approximately 70 percent. The ratio of Iraq's per person expenditure to that of the United States declined from approximately 1:7 in 1990 to about 1:32 in 2003. This actually understates the change because in 1990 Iraq spent a much smaller percentage of its defense budget on personnel than did the United States. In 2003 it spent much more on personnel. Since the Gulf War, Iraq had spent perhaps \$5,000 total per soldier on equipment purchases of any sort. The United States had spent more than \$450,000 per person in uniform.

Sources: Paul Rivlin, "Iraq's Economy: What's Left?," *Tel Aviv Notes*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (2 February 2003); *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2003* (Washington DC: Office of the Comptroller, March 2002); International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2001-2002; 2002-2003* (Oxford: IISS and Oxford University Press, 2000, 2002); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 1999, 2000, 2002: Armaments, Disarmament, and International Security* (Oxford: SIPRI and Oxford University Press, 1999, 2000, 2002); Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraqi Military Forces Ten Years After the Gulf War* (Washington DC: CSIS, August, 2000); US Department of State, Bureau of Verification and Compliance, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1998* (Washington DC: US State Department, 2000); and, US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *WMEAT 1995; 1991-1992* (Washington DC:, 1996; 1994).

⁴ On the deterability of Iraq see Charles A. Duelfer, "Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs in Iraq", testimony before the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats & Capabilities, Armed Services Committee of the United States Senate, 27 February 2002. <http://www.csis.org/hill/ts020227duelfer.htm>

Beyond deterrence, the United States and other concerned powers could have further enhanced their security by strengthening and extending the monitoring regime -- perhaps making it permanent -- at a relatively small cost. Notably, the incremental costs associated with an enhanced inspection/monitoring regime and a dedicated deterrence posture would likely not have exceeded \$3 billion per annum. And, of course, there were military options short of full-scale war that could have been used, if necessary, to blunt Iraqi capabilities. These included (i) the capacity to conduct smaller counter-force strikes against Iraq should the retention of special weapons become evident and (ii) the capacity to launch a true pre-emptive attack in response to Iraqi preparations for aggression.

Thus, in no sense would US security have been solely or even principally dependent on the success of the UN disarmament missions -- although these missions did serve to enhance security and strengthen deterrence.

The value and limits of arms control

What the UN disarmament missions could never do, under any circumstances, was provide certainty that Iraq had completely relinquished all elements of its proscribed weapon programs.⁵ Certainty is an unachievable epistemic standard. Even a degree of assurance less demanding than certainty is difficult to achieve when the goal is the total elimination of a capability. It is simply too easy for some small part of a proscribed arsenal or production capability to be secreted away. Thus, the "uncertainty gap" cannot be closed entirely; there will always be residual uncertainty.

These shortfalls are characteristic of real-world arms control efforts. Nonetheless, such efforts can contribute substantially to reducing and containing threats and instability. With regard to assessing UNMOVIC's achievements, we should keep several propositions in mind:

- While it may be impossible to completely verify total disarmament, arms control efforts can produce high levels of confidence regarding the absence of both larger-scale capabilities and overt activities such as field tests and training (which are essential to the utility of military assets);

⁵ UNMOVIC set out to determine how many systems of the proscribed types were produced or procured by Iraq and how many remained available, if any -- the latter being subject to destruction under the supervision of UNMOVIC. UNMOVIC's method has been to construct a comprehensive picture of Iraq's weapon programs -- from raw materials to stockpiles -- reaching back twenty years and accounting for the disposition of every proscribed system, all relevant raw materials, and the entire weapon production infrastructure. Iraq has borne principal responsibility for accounting for its proscribed systems and providing supporting evidence -- documents, testimony, and material -- the adequacy of which was to be assessed by UNMOVIC analysts and commissioners. UNMOVIC has required that Iraqi declarations be supported by multiple sources, that there be consistency among these sources, that Iraqi claims be further supported by material evidence (production equipment, raw materials, weapons, or weapon remnants), and that this evidence be quantifiable -- that is, subject to counting. Of course, UNMOVIC also has sought to verify Iraqi claims on its own and has sought input from UN member-state intelligence agencies, several of which have kept Iraq and its dealings under close surveillance for a decade.

- Apart from the central goal of arms reduction, efforts like UNSCOM and UNMOVIC contribute to security by disrupting proscribed activities, adding to the store of useful intelligence, and providing early warning of any prospective “break out” or “rush to action” by the nation under scrutiny.
- Arms control efforts characteristically form just one part of an interlocking suite of security measures, including capabilities for deterrence, defense, coercive diplomacy, and pre-emptive counter-force strikes. These measures are mutually reinforcing. The value of arms control should be viewed in this broader context. Deterrence capabilities, especially, can provide a powerful hedge against uncertainty -- effectively mitigating the “uncertainty gap” mentioned above.

While complete elimination of WMD arsenals and their means of delivery is an important goal, partial reduction can also have quite significant effects. Large arsenals are qualitatively more threatening than small ones. Large stores of weapons facilitate the repeated, wide-spread, and varied use of these weapons in combat. Large arsenals of special weapons also allow the nations that possess them to conduct extensive field tests and training -- so they become confident and skilled in their use. Finally, a large arsenal gives some assurance that a fair number of weapons would survive any pre-emptive counter-force strike. This gives the possessor a “second strike” deterrent guarantee -- which acts to deter others from attempting a pre-emptive counter-force strike in the first place.

For these reasons, an important intermediate disarmament goal -- short of complete disarmament -- would be to reduce an arsenal below the threshold at which it constitutes a reliable, flexible force. A regime with only a handful of special weapons is not likely to spend them -- except in an effort to fend off an attack that threatens its survival.

Why the United States could not convince the Security Council

The power of deterrence and the availability of options other than war were certainly perceived by the Security Council, including the United States -- although they were largely overlooked in US public discourse before the war. They remain largely invisible today, as evinced by the significance attached to the continuing search for proscribed weapons in Iraq -- as though discovering them would vindicate the Anglo-American decision to go to war.⁶ But this misconstrues the Security Council dispute and occludes the war’s true significance.

The Security Council dispute regarding the Iraq crisis resolved into several disagreements:

⁶ Matt Kelley, “US Searching Iraq for Chemical Arms,” *Associated Press*, 24 March 2003; Mark Matthews, “US has stake in locating Iraqi weapons; Bush declaration puts burden on forces to find presumed arsenal,” *Baltimore Sun*, 19 March 2003, p.17; and, Judith Miller, “Disarming Saddam Hussein; Teams of Experts to Hunt Iraq Arms,” *New York Times*, 19 March 2003, p. 1.

- First, over whether the UN disarmament effort was making meaningful progress and was worth continuing;
- Second, over what would constitute sufficient evidence that the Hussein regime was hiding stores of proscribed weapons;
- Third, over whether full-scale war, in any case, was the necessary response to Iraqi “material breeches” (including WMD possession); and
- Fourth, over the proper venue for making a decision about war and the proper institutional framework for conducting it.

Taken together these disagreements pertained not only to the Iraq crisis but also and more generally to the place of war, diplomacy, and multilateralism in the policy of nations. Implicit in US policy on Iraq was a revolution in the norms of international behavior -- a revolution that began with changing the rules of arms control.

The US position ostensibly rested on two propositions: first, that Iraq was not destroying its stock of special weapons as promised and, second, that the proper and necessary response to Iraq’s possession of these weapons was war and regime removal. But the United States not only failed to convince a majority that war was a necessary and proper response to Iraqi noncompliance, it also failed to convince the Council that the UN disarmament mission had hit a dead end. The United States subsequently derided the United Nations for its supposed unwillingness to confront the Iraqi threat and enforce its own resolutions.⁷ More germane to the Council’s refusal to pull the plug on UNMOVIC, however, were several realities that the administration’s invective could not obscure:

- Prior to the war there had been no actual finds of new or residual weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, despite more than 600 inspections at 350 sites by UNMOVIC and the combined efforts of US and allied intelligence establishments.
- All of the “smoking gun” intelligence tips offered by US and British agencies fell flat when subsequently checked in the field by inspectors or journalists.⁸ The single

⁷ David L. Greene, “Bush Implores UN to Show ‘Backbone’; World Body Is Risking Irrelevancy If it Doesn’t Confront Iraq, He Warns,” *Baltimore Sun*, 14 February 2003, p. 1; John Donnelly, “‘Inspections Will Not Work,’ Powell Says Accuses Iraq of Duplicity and Delay,” *Boston Globe*, 22 January 2003, p. 1; and, Hilary Mackenzie, “‘I’ll Act Alone, Bush Warns, Iraq, UN: ‘Those Who Choose to Live in Denial May Eventually Be Forced to Live in Fear’,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 17 October 2002, p. 7.

⁸ Much of the initial work of UN inspectors upon returning to Iraq focused on numerous sites targeted by the CIA as suspect: none showed evidence of illicit weapon activity. Similarly, UNMOVIC inspections of Iraqi food testing trucks based on US suggestions that they might be mobile bioweapon labs found them to be what the Iraqis had claimed: food testing trucks. Probably most damaging to the administration’s credibility were its claims about the Iraqi nuclear program, which suggested a rapidly advancing program where none was evident, and its claims about a vital link

between the Hussein regime and Al Qaeda, which many governments, analysts, and intelligence agencies (including the British and American) found to be tendentious.

A variety of claims made about the reconstitution of the Iraqi nuclear program proved to be unfounded, including:

- President Bush's assertion that the IAEA had concluded in a report that the Iraqi program had been revived;
- the assertion that new construction at the Tuweitha complex proved a revived nuclear program; and
- the assertion that Iraqi purchases of 81mm aluminum tubes were meant to support its effort to produce weapon grade material.

The most serious lapse regarding the nuclear issue (and the credibility of the US effort generally) was the claim that Iraq had attempted to import uranium ore from Niger, which turned out to be based on badly forged documents. In attempting to make its case, the administration ignored CIA doubts about the documents.

Administration claims of a link between the Hussein regime and Al Qaeda also proved weak, with the intelligence agencies of both the United States and Great Britain casting doubt on the assertion. Initially the claim rested heavily on a supposed meeting between Al Qaeda and Iraqi principals in the Czech Republic, but this report was later retracted by Czech intelligence. The Administration also tried to link the two via Ansar al-Islam, a radical Islamic group operating in the Kurdish sector. It was supposed to have hosted members of a group led by Abu Mussab al Zarqawi, who in turn was said to be an associate of bin Laden and to have received medical treatment in Baghdad. That the hospital stay proved a link to the Hussein regime was thought tendentious by many analysts and even Ansar's adversaries in the Kurdish area doubted any link between the group and the Hussein regime.

A number of other "smoking gun" assertions made by the administration also proved to be poorly supported by evidence on examination. Notably, these include:

- President Bush's assertion that Iraq possessed or was developing UAVs that could target the United States;
- Secretary Powell's assertion that the Islamic group Ansar al-Islam was running a "poison factory" in Kurdish-controlled Iraq;
- The administration's assertion that Iraqi "Quds-10" drone was suited for delivery of special weapons and might have a combat radius in excess of 500 km; and
- The assertion that development at the Al Musayyib missile facility indicated development of proscribed weapons.

Sources on inspection of suspect sites targeted by October 2002 CIA report: "Inspectors Call U.S. Tips 'Garbage'," *CBSNEWS.com*, 20 February 2003; Michael R. Gordon and James Risen, "Findings Of U.N. Group Undercut U.S. Assertion," *New York Times*, 28 January 2003, p. 9; Bob Drogin and Maggie Farley, "Hard Claims but Only Soft Proof So Far in Iraq; Inspectors, acting on data from the CIA, have yet to substantiate U.S. allegations," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 January 2003, p. 1; Howard Witt, "UN inspectors reinforced by US intelligence reports," *Toronto Star*, 22 December 2002, p. 4; Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "U.N. Revisits Suspect Plants; No Evidence of Rebuilding At Veterinary Medicine Lab," *Washington Post*, 29 November 2002, p. 1; David Blair, "Inspectors visit suspected missile test site," *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 2002, p. 18; CIA, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs* (Langley, Virginia: CIA, October 2002); and, Bob Drogin and Maggie Farley, "Sky-spy photos 'open to interpretation' but there's little doubt about bio-weapons," *The Gazette* (Montreal), 10 September 2002, p. B1.

Sources on mobile weapons labs: Dan Plesch, "US claim dismissed by Blix," *The Guardian*, 5 February 2003; and, Paul Richter and Greg Miller, "Inspectors to Scour Iraq for Mobile Weapons Labs," *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 2002, p.1.

Sources on aluminum tubes: Peter Beinart, "Truth Be Told," *The New Republic*, 24 March 2003; IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, *The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: An Update*, Statement to the United Nations Security Council, New York, 7 March 2003; "Inspectors Call U.S. Tips 'Garbage'," *CBSNEWS.com*, 20 February 2003; and, Joby Warrick, "U.S. Claim on Iraqi Nuclear Program Is Called Into Question," *Washington Post*, 24 January 2003.

most important “find” -- that Iraq had developed a missile system which marginally exceeded the limits set by UNSCOM -- was reported by Iraq itself in its 7 December declaration.⁹ Likewise, the “Quds-10” drone, which US sources said might constitute a “smoking gun” had been reported by Iraq in January.

Contrary to US assertions, very substantial Iraqi disarmament -- involving tens of thousands of weapons -- had occurred during the 1990s under the supervision of UNSCOM, the precursor to UNMOVIC. (See companion essay, PDA Briefing Memo 27: *Disarming Iraq: What Did the UN Missions Accomplish?*) And, Iraqi cooperation seemed to be improving and UNMOVIC was making some steady, demonstrable progress. Significant disarmament as well as efforts to clarify the disposition of “unaccounted for” weapons were underway when the Bush administration announced that the diplomatic window had closed.

The end of diplomacy

Throughout the spring and summer of 2002 the Bush administration had failed to make a winning case to the Security Council (and most of the world) on the pivotal question: was war necessary? In fall 2002, on the eve of national elections, the administration switched to a two-track strategy. The aim was to deflect charges of unilateralism and make it politically easier for prospective allies to join the war cause -- without sacrificing the US momentum toward war.

Sources on forged documentation of uranium ore import: IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, *The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: An Update*, Statement to the United Nations Security Council, New York, 7 March 2003; and, Dana Priest and Karen DeYoung, “CIA Questioned Documents Linking Iraq, Uranium Ore,” *Washington Post*, 22 March 2003, p. 30.

Sources on claimed Hussein-Al Qaeda link: Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, “Bin Laden-Hussein Link Hazy: U.S. Officials Qualify Statements on Possible Terrorist Ties,” *Washington Post*, 13 February 2003, p. 20; International Crisis Group, *Radical Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Mouse That Roared?*, Iraq Briefing (Amman/Brussels: ICG, 7 February 2003); “Leaked report rejects Iraqi al-Qaeda link,” *BBC News Online*, 5 February 2003; C. J. Chivers, “Threats and Responses: Northern Iraq; Kurds Puzzled by Report of Terror Camp,” *New York Times*, 6 February 2003, p. 22; Paul Reynolds, “Analysis: Iraq and al-Qaeda,” *BBC News Online*, 28 October 2002; Martin Walker, “Czechs retract terror link,” *United Press International*, 20 October 2002; and, Julian Borger, “Threat of war: US intelligence questions Bush claims on Iraq: Presidents televised address attacked by CIA,” *Guardian*, 9 October 2002, p. 12.

General sources: Glen Rangwala, *Claims in Secretary of State Colin Powell's UN Presentation concerning Iraq*, 5th Feb 2003, MiddleEastReference (18 March 2003); Walter Pincus and Dana Milbank, “Bush Clings To Dubious Allegations About Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 18 March 2003, p. 13; Scott Peterson, “The Case of the ‘Deadly’ Drone: An unmanned aircraft with a 25-foot wingspan is at the center of a US/UN weapons controversy,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 March 2003; Luke Harding, “Revealed: truth behind US ‘poison factory’ claim; reports from the terrorist camp in northern Iraq named by Colin Powell as a centre of the al-Qaeda international network,” *The Observer*, 9 February 2003; Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Iraq Shows Facilities Cited by Powell; Missiles Within U.N.'s Limits, Officials Assert,” *Washington Post*, 8 February 2003, p. 14; “Media Tour Alleged ‘Poison Site’ in Iraq; Islamic Militants Show Press the Camp Powell Called Poison Site,” *Associated Press*, 8 February 2003; and, Julian Borger, “Threat of war: US intelligence questions Bush claims on Iraq: Presidents televised address attacked by CIA,” *Guardian*, 9 October 2002, p. 12.

⁹ Iraq argued that the system -- the al-Samoud -- fell within permitted limits.

The first track involved a shallow nod to multilateralism. It led through the Security Council and was meant to walk the world closer to accepting the need for taking serious action against Iraq. While acquiescing to a “last chance” disarmament mission, the administration sought to focus concern in the Council (and in the public sphere) on the presumed ineffectiveness of UNMOVIC, the evasiveness of Iraq, and the possibility that Iraq still retained proscribed weapons in large numbers. In the public debate, these issues quickly took precedence over the more fundamental and controversial question: was war an appropriate and necessary response to noncompliance? The presumption for many Security Council members was that this question would be addressed later, if necessary.

The second track was meant to ensure that the prime option for dealing with Iraqi noncompliance would be a US-led war. This track led directly to the Persian Gulf and involved accelerated, unilateral preparations for war. This had the salutary effect of prying open Iraq’s doors to inspectors to an extent never before possible. But it also preempted a broader multinational discussion of appropriate options should UNMOVIC fail. And it preempted discussion of an appropriate institutional framework for exercising those options. In essence, the United States reserved these decisions for itself. It assembled a pre-packaged, virtually automatic option should the Security Council conclude that Iraq was not complying. Moreover, as the US force deployment gained an aura of “unstoppable momentum”, it implicitly posed a stark choice to other nations: either join the Anglo-American war effort or lose the opportunity to influence both that effort and the future of Iraq.¹⁰

¹⁰ While the Bush administration was careful to avoid saying that war was simply inevitable, those around it frequently expressed this position. As for the White House: it restricted itself to expressing weak hopes and strong doubts about the prospects for a peaceful resolution, while repeatedly asserting that the United States did not require UN authorization in order to go to war.

Julian Borger, “Analysis: Pentagon build-up is reaching an unstoppable momentum,” *Guardian*, 31 December 2002, p.12;

Philip Dine, “Analysts See Chance of Averting a War with Iraq Growing Dim,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 December 2002, p. 1;

John Donnelly, “‘Inspections Will Not Work,’ Powell Says Accuses Iraq of Duplicity and Delay,” *Boston Globe*, 22 January 2003, p. 1;

Sean Gordon, “‘Allies’ pressure won’t stop U.S. buildup: analysts: ‘The only reason you ramp up is to go to war,’” *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 January 2003, p. 7;

Linda Feldmann, “US jockeys to keep trigger for war at hand,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 December 2002, p. 1;

Anne E. Kornblut and Robert Schlesinger, “Bush Presses Case for War; US Troops Operate in Northern Iraq; President Pushes Case for Ousting Hussein,” *Boston Globe*, 30 January 2003, p. 21;

Hilary Mackenzie, “‘I’ll Act Alone, Bush Warns, Iraq, UN: ‘Those Who Choose to Live in Denial May Eventually Be Forced to Live in Fear,’” *Ottawa Citizen*, 17 October 2002, p. 7;

Ewen Macaskill and Edward Pilkington, “Richard Perle, a Key Bush Adviser, Has Little Faith in Hans Blix’s Ability to Succeed Against Saddam: UN Inspection Team ‘Cannot Prevent War,’” *Guardian*, 13 November 2002, p. 13;

The administration fully expected that either the inspections would turn-up weapons or, more likely, Iraq would resist the inspections.¹¹ Certainly, the inspection regime was much more intrusive than its predecessor, UNSCOM, which itself had been the most intrusive effort in the history of arms control up to that point. Had Hussein played to type and resisted, the Security Council and world opinion would have hardened against him and in favor of “serious consequences”. To conclude that full-scale war was the necessary and appropriate “consequence” would still have required a substantial leap, but the political costs of making that leap would have been lessened. In this context, the Bush administration would have found it easier to round-up coalition partners for its war train -- having already ensured that the train was fueled and about to depart the station.

As it turned out, Iraq did not play entirely to type. UNMOVIC was able to deploy and make some demonstrable progress, including the destruction of some weapons. This compelled the Bush administration to argue that, in fact, the Security Council and its chosen instrument, UNMOVIC, were being duped.

Making something out of nothing

Central to the US stance was the proposition that Saddam Hussein assuredly retained proscribed weapons in substantial numbers and, thus, was not disarming -- at least not in any significant way. At the beginning of December 2002, shortly after Iraq had submitted its weapons report, the administration confidently asserted that, “If Iraqis continue to maintain in their declaration that they do not have weapons of mass destruction, we are certainly prepared to show the international community this is not the case.”¹² Secretary of State Powell finally delivered the administration’s case to the Security Council on 5 February 2003, but what he produced as evidence fell far short of showing that Iraq still possessed proscribed weapons.¹³ Much of what he offered was

Derek Rose and Richard Sisk, “Iraq OKs Inspections - but U.S. Skeptical; Team Bush Calls it 'Tactic That Will Fail',” *Daily News* (New York), 17 September 2002, p. 7; and

Marc Sandalow, “Bush Leaves Little Room to Avert War; 'We Don't Need U.N. Approval,' He Tells National Audience,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7 March 2003, p. 1.

¹¹ Steven R. Weisman, “US to Seek Tests to Show That Iraq Resists Disarming,” *New York Times*, 16 February 2003, p. 1; Robin Wright, “U.S. Banks On Iraqi Omissions,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 2003, p.1; Michael J. Jordan, “Ambiguity shrouds 'material breach' U.N. council didn't define term for Iraq,” *New York Times*, December 15, 2002; Bill Nichols, “U.S. expects Iraq to lie in declaration,” *USA Today*, 6 December 2002, p. 8; David E. Sanger and Richard W. Stevenson, “‘Not Encouraging,’ Bush Says of Iraq on Arms Demands,” *New York Times*, 3 December 2002, p 1; John Diamond and Bill Nichols, “US expects inspectors will find proof for war,” *USA Today*, November 20, 2002, p 12; William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “The U.N. Trap?,” *The Weekly Standard*, November 18, 2002; David E. Sanger, “Threats and Responses: the President; Bush Declares U.S. Is Using Diplomacy to Disarm Hussein,” *New York Times*, October 22, 2002, P. 1; and Kenneth T. Walsh, et al, “Another step closer to war,” *US News and World Report*, October 21, 2002, Pg. 30.

¹² Mark Matthews, US is ready to respond to Iraq weapons declaration,” *Baltimore Sun*, 4 December 2002, p. 1.

¹³ Secretary Colin L. Powell, *Remarks to the United Nations Security Council*, New York City, February 5, 2003 (Washington DC: US Department of State, February 2003); available at:

supposition, conjecture, and raw intelligence leads (which did not, upon subsequent field investigation, lead anywhere).

Powell made much of UNMOVIC and UNSCOM's report of thousands of "unaccounted for" Iraqi weapons, treating these as though they were known to exist. But the designation of these weapons as "not accounted for" by UNMOVIC did not reflect positive knowledge that they still existed and remained available to Iraq. In most cases Iraq claimed that these items had been consumed, lost, or destroyed. For the UN missions, the category encompassed proscribed items that it thought had once existed, but whose disposition and current status had not been adequately verified in accord with UNSCOM/UNMOVIC standards. Ontologically, these were not "weapons". They were "question marks" -- unresolved issues -- arising from poor or incomplete Iraqi records, discrepancies between different Iraqi accounts, or difficulties in verifying or quantifying Iraqi claims of lost, consumed, or destroyed weapons. By designating some weapons as "unaccounted for", UNMOVIC meant to convey its uncertainty about their disposition. But Hans Blix took pains to caution that "One must not jump to the conclusion that they exist".¹⁴ Of course, the existence of these weapons is precisely what the Bush administration consistently asserted.

The willful distortion of what UNSCOM had meant by the technical phrase "unaccounted for weapons" was central to the administration's strategy from the beginning. By this route, the administration sought to convince the world that unless Iraq actually came up with and surrendered thousands of weapons, it was hiding something quite substantial. Likewise, this distortion was the basis for arguing that unless the UNMOVIC inspectors discovered stockpiles of proscribed items, the inspections were failing. As deftly put by *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Robin Wright, the administration's strategy was to convince the world that "nothing was something."¹⁵

Powell's Evidence: Debasing the Standards of Proof

The highlights of Powell's presentation were communication intercepts and satellite photographs.

The intercepts, he alleged, caught Iraqi functionaries discussing an effort to hide weapons. But other, less damning interpretations seemed more likely. In one recording that occurred four days after the discovery of 12 empty chemical warheads in a warehouse, two Iraqi officers discuss "the possibility there is, by chance, forbidden ammo" at another site and the need to "clean out all the areas, the scrap areas, the abandoned areas." Clearly, this does not refer to known stores of weapons. But it could reveal an intent to search for and retain any remaining weapons. Or it could

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2003/17300.htm>

¹⁴ Hans Blix, *Briefing of the Security Council*, 14 February 2003 (New York: UNMOVIC, February 2003), section "Work in Iraq"; available at: <http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic>

¹⁵ Robin Wright, "U.S. Banks On Iraqi Omissions," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 2003, p.1.

reflect an intent to search for and discretely destroy them. Another possible interpretation is suggested by the fact that the conversation occurred on the same day that Iraq announced it had found four more empty warheads, which it promptly turned over to UNMOVIC.¹⁶

As for the photographs: they showed activity at known weapons sites. At some sites, decontamination vehicles, cranes, or cargo trucks were evident. This, Powell asserted, implied the presence of proscribed weapons -- but none were actually shown or tracked. Again, alternative interpretations seemed equally or more plausible. Hans Blix concluded that the activity "could just as easily have been a routine activity."¹⁷ And, indeed, Secretary Powell qualified his statement by saying, "We don't know precisely what Iraq was moving." Nor, apparently, could he say to where Iraq was moving the unknown items -- although the US ability to spy from the sky was otherwise quite impressive. Subsequently, Iraqi officials took journalists to one of the sites in Powell's photographs, the Al Musayyib missile facility, and explained that the photographed activity involved moving al-Samoud missiles, which were regularly rotated to and from the facility for testing and calibration.¹⁸ (The al-Samoud missile was later found to marginally exceed the permitted range. Iraq was in the process of destroying them under supervision when the war began.)

It is remarkable that Secretary Powell would openly state that "[w]e don't know precisely what Iraq was moving" in the context of making an argument for imposing serious consequences on Iraq -- which no one doubted meant war. But the assertion fairly reflected his presentation as a whole, which served to raise suspicions about Iraq without settling them one way or the other. While Powell's presentation has been compared favorably to Adlai Stevenson's during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the similarities between the two are superficial only. The differences make clear the way in which the Bush administration sought to dramatically lower the standards of proof.

Powell versus Stevenson

The photographic evidence that Kennedy presented to the nation on 22 October 1962, and that Ambassador Stevenson presented the following day to the UN Security Council, showed new and rapid construction of 9 secret military sites in Cuba with equipment and layouts typical of missile launch areas.¹⁹ There appeared to be launch

¹⁶ Ian Fisher, "Iraq Discloses 4 Warheads In What Arms Inspector Calls 'Constructive' Talks," *New York Times*, 20 January 2003, p. 12; and, Julia Preston, Inspectors Find Empty Warheads in an Iraqi Depot, *New York Times*, 17 January 2003, p. 1. Also see analysis of intercepts in Glen Rangwala, *Claims in Secretary of State Colin Powell's UN Presentation concerning Iraq, 5th Feb 2003*, MiddleEastReference (20 February 2003); available at: <http://middleeastreference.org.uk/powell030205.html>

¹⁷ "Key points: UN inspectors' report," *BBC News Online*, 17 February 2003.

¹⁸ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Iraq Shows Facilities Cited by Powell; Missiles Within U.N.'s Limits, Officials Assert," *Washington Post*, 8 February 2003, p. 14.

pads, missile erector equipment, long storage tents or sheds, fuel trucks, revetments, command bunkers, and lines of electrical cable for launch control.²⁰ The revelation of the sites, although itself quite incriminating, was not the half of it. The central pieces of evidence brought forward by Kennedy and Stevenson were photographs showing 14 large transporters at the sites bearing canvas-covered cargo that was cylindrical in shape and about 70 feet long, 9 feet wide. These cylinders, which accompanied the launch vehicles, were consistent with the size and shape of SS-5 medium-range nuclear missiles -- and not much else. No plausible competing interpretation was offered at the time. Instead, the Soviet ambassador to the United Nations, Valerian Zorin, challenged the authenticity of the photographs. To this, Stevenson had a reply that demonstrated the Kennedy administration's confidence in its case:

I wonder if the Soviet Union would ask its Cuban colleague to permit a U.N. team to go to these sites. If so, I can assure you that we can direct them to the proper places very quickly.²¹

In proposing a simple test of the American assertions, Stevenson added incomparably to the weight of the administration's charges. This final, pivotal step is precisely the one that Secretary Powell failed to take on 5 February 2003.

Kennedy and Stevenson had offered positive evidence that the Soviets and Cubans had overstepped a strategic "line in the sand". By comparison, Secretary Powell's evidence did not establish that Iraq still possessed proscribed weapons or that Iraq was circumventing UNMOVIC's disarmament efforts. Powell's evidence could only support the more modest -- some might say "self-evident" -- proposition that there could not be certainty about Iraqi compliance.

Dispensing with Negotiated Arms Control

No serious arms control specialist would contest that arms control regimes are subject to a degree of irreducible uncertainty. Verification has its limits. Speaking of the Iraq case in particular, the IAEA's director-general, Mohamed ElBaradei, observed that,

No verification programme can provide absolute guarantees that every facility or piece of equipment has been seen; there is always some degree of risk - and for that reason we need to continue to maintain a monitoring and verification presence in Iraq well into the future.²²

¹⁹ *The Photographs on The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: 40th Anniversary* web page, National Security Archive, George Washington University; available at: http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/

²⁰ *Chronologies of the Crisis on The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: 40th Anniversary* web page, National Security Archive, George Washington University; available at: http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/

²¹ US Department of State, *Bulletin*, Volume XLVII, No. 1220 (November 12, 1962), pp. 737-740.

²² Mohamed ElBaradei, "Mission Possible: Nuclear Weapons Inspections in Iraq," *Wall Street Journal*, 7 March

Of course, the supplementary measures suggested by ElBaradei would also be subject to the types of suspicion voiced by Powell on 5 February 2003. There will always be intelligence data available that, under some interpretation, is consistent with the view that an arms control regime is being circumvented. The critical issue is whether such interpretations are the best and most likely ones.

The radical import of Powell's approach is that it could call into question the entire practice of arms control. No regime could pass muster if the standards for proving circumvention were as loose as those employed by Powell. At heart, this approach disparages the practice of arms control because it is subject to uncertainty. This may not be Colin Powell's personal view -- in which case he merely acted the good soldier on 5 February. But it is a view common among some in the US strategic community -- a view that produced the arms control "pause" at the beginning of the Reagan administration and that more recently has led the US to abandon or minimize several long-standing arms control efforts.

By the end of the US-Iraq conflict the United States may find positive proof of Iraqi circumvention. But this would no more vindicate Powell's standards than it would vindicate war as the necessary response to Iraqi possession of WMDs. It would only prove that suspicions are sometimes correct. The broader and lasting issue would remain: The appearance of possibly "suspicious behavior" should not be accepted generally as sufficient reason to terminate arms control efforts -- much less go to war. To think otherwise would spell the end of arms control and would unnecessarily increase the resort to war.

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